

## CHLAMYDIA

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### What is chlamydia?

Chlamydia is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by the bacteria *Chlamydia trachomatis*. Chlamydia is now recognized as one of the most common and among the most damaging of all STDs seen in the United States today.

### Who gets chlamydia?

Anybody who has unprotected sex can be infected with chlamydia. Virtually all chlamydia infections are sexually transmitted, except those of newborns, who may acquire this infection from their mother during birth.

### What are the symptoms?

In *women*, the endocervix is the most common site infected by *Chlamydia trachomatis*. The vast majority of these infections are asymptomatic (without symptoms). Approximately 75% of females who are infected do not have any symptoms. Symptoms, when present, include a vaginal discharge that is white, clear or grey; painful urination (dysuria); lower abdominal pain, or bleeding between menstrual periods. In *men*, symptoms of chlamydia infection include a urethral discharge that may or may not occur only in the morning before urinating for the first time. However, approximately 50% of infected males are asymptomatic.

### How soon do symptoms appear?

The onset of symptoms typically occurs within 7 to 14 days after infection, but may occur anywhere between 2 and 35 days. Asymptomatic infections are common.

### How long can an infected person spread the bacteria?

The period of communicability is unknown, but may be weeks or months.

### How is *Chlamydia trachomatis* diagnosed?

Currently available tests for detection of *Chlamydia trachomatis* include isolation of the bacteria in a cell culture, detection of antibodies against the bacteria, or identification of the bacteria's genetic material (DNA).

### What is the treatment for chlamydia?

Antibiotics are necessary to treat chlamydia.

## **What are the complications of untreated chlamydia?**

A major complication of untreated chlamydial disease in women is pelvic inflammatory disease or PID. Women who have PID are at risk of suffering from infertility or from experiencing an ectopic (tubal) pregnancy, which can be a life-threatening condition. Pregnant women who are infected with chlamydia are at increased risk of preterm delivery. The bacteria may also be transmitted to their newborn and cause pneumonia or an eye infection in the baby.

Complications of untreated chlamydial disease in men include epididymitis (inflammation of the testicles), or infertility.

## **What should a person do if he/she is exposed to someone infected with chlamydia?**

The person exposed should stop having sex, and seek medical care as soon as possible for examination and treatment. Keep in mind that the disease could remain asymptomatic for long periods of time.

## **How can the spread of chlamydia be stopped?**

Some general guidelines are:

- You can reduce your risk of getting chlamydia by not having sex with anyone or by having sex only with one uninfected partner who has sex only with you.
- Regular examinations for sexually transmitted diseases are advised when unprotected sex is practiced.
- Patients should abstain from sexual intercourse for 7 days after being treated with a single-dose of antibiotics or until completion of a 7-day course of antibiotics.
- Patients should also abstain from sexual intercourse until all of their sex partners are treated to minimize the risk of reinfection.
- Individuals should seek medical treatment when symptoms are present, even if they are mild.
- Sexually active women of reproductive age who are having sex with more than one partner, or whose partner is having sex with others, should be tested for chlamydia during each annual gynecological check up.

## **Where can I get more information?**

- Your personal doctor.
- Your local health department listed in your telephone directory.
- The Utah Department of Health, Bureau of Epidemiology (801) 538-6191.

**UTAH DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
BUREAU OF EPIDEMIOLOGY**

August 2001